

New Kids' Show Is Super Cool

TOURING theatre shows don't usually come with free ice cream ...

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The cast of Pokey Hat pose in front of the star performer, the refurbished ice cream van.

but Pokey Hat is something special.

Glasgow's own Grinagog Theatre's latest production is being performed in an ice cream van, with specially composed jingles and all.

It's appearing at Queen's Baton Relay events all over Scotland and during the Commonwealth Games, as part of the Glasgow 2014 Cultural Programme.

In fact, artistic director Claire McGarry explains, there will be 95 performances of Pokey Hat taking place over the summer

... and counting.

"It's more than double what we originally planned, but it's just been so popular we've had a great response from so many venues," she says.

"We're really excited about it, especially now the designer has got to work on our van."

When Claire, composer Ollie Searle and writer Martin O'Connor first put their heads together for Pokey Hat - "we have always wanted to do a show in an ice cream van," she explains - they had no idea how to get their hands on an actual van.

"Then we heard about an ice cream van that had been abandoned in Johnstone, which was then vandalised and taken into police custody, so we thought we'd have a look and see if we could 'rescue' it," she says, with a laugh.

"It's lovely," says Claire, "quite old-fashioned. I like the idea we're giving it a new life, and I hope we can use it for other things beyond this tour."

Claire's friends, who know she is currently learning to drive, think it's hilarious.

"They find it funny that my first 'car' will be an ice cream van," she grins.

"Everyone can remember chasing the ice cream van as a kid - that whole excitement of hearing the chimes and rushing to get your shoes on and find it, and then missing it and having to run to the next street.

"I also associate it with holidays. We used to go to Rothesay and the ice cream van would come right on to the beach.

"One time it got stuck and we all had to help push it out. We got a free Wham bar each!"

Grinagog Theatre, one of Scotland's best companies producing work for young people and families, is based at Platform in Easterhouse.

Since 2009 almost 40,000 children, their parents and carers have seen its work in schools, venues and community centres across Scotland.

It was the first company to make the early years Christmas show for the Citizens Theatre and other previous productions include The Edibles, Little Ulla and Max On Holiday.

As part of their research for Pokey Hat, Claire and the team talked to people all over the East End of Glasgow about their own ice cream memories, including the granddaughter of the man who owned the Rendezvous Cafe, now immortalised in the Riverside Museum.

"I learned a lot about something I just took for granted before," Claire says.

"The show is really about the way we used to live, the associations Glasgow has with the Italian community, and our love of cafe culture, as well as our fondness for ice cream vans.

"Listening to people's stories, they were usually about family relationships or friendships and courtships, so it was incredibly life-affirming."

She grins: "It's full of music, and fun too. We're working out a song just now, for example, on ginger bottles."

Pokey Hat is touring Scotland from June 7, calling in at Alexandra Park on June 21, Glasgow Green on July 25 and 26 and the Merchant City Festival on August 2 and 3.

Events are free and unticketed unless specified and further dates and times will be added. Check the website for details at www.grinagog.co.uk